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Latent Tariff Gains or Losses in Food and Live Animals Trade by ECOWAS Sub-Regional Members

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Abstract

This study evaluates latent tariff gains and losses in the trade of food and live animals among ECOWAS member states from 2008 to 2023, with an emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of regional trade liberalization policies. The primary objectives include estimating export and import volumes, analyzing net trade balances, and identifying disparities in trade performance across member countries. Secondary data were sourced from the UN Comtrade database and analyzed using descriptive statistics and net trade analysis. The findings reveal marked disparities in intra-regional trade, with Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal emerging as dominant exporters, while countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Liberia displayed limited engagement. Export volumes peaked at 1.67 billion USD in 2017, experienced a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic (950 million USD in 2020), and subsequently began to recover. Net trade performance varied significantly; Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal consistently posted surpluses (e.g., +137 million USD for Côte d'Ivoire in 2018), whereas Burkina Faso and Niger reported persistent deficits (e.g., -49 million USD for Burkina Faso in 2021). These results underscore structural imbalances in trade flows and point to the need for coordinated policy measures aimed at reducing

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non-tariff barriers, enhancing trade facilitation, and supporting less competitive economies within the region. While ECOWAS has made progress toward regional integration through trade liberalization, the realization of equitable economic participation demands targeted strategies to address persistent disparities and external vulnerabilities. Further research should examine the influence of political instability and international trade agreements on regional trade dynamics.

Keywords: ECOWAS; Trade liberalization; Tariff gains; Food and live animals; Net trade.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was designed as a strategic platform to foster collaboration in vital areas like commerce, industry, transport, communications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, and monetary policies, with the broader aim of attaining economic independence in the sub-region (Eze, 2020). A central aim of ECOWAS has been advancing trade liberalization, viewed as a key approach for regional economic unity and long-term growth in West Africa (Ogunnoiki, 2018). Key steps included forming a free trade zone, progressively removing tariffs and other trade obstacles, and standardizing customs processes—all intended to facilitate a smooth regional marketplace (Babatunde & Olayemi, 2021).

Trade cooperation agreements were established to benefit from expanded markets by fostering conditions that promote fast economic growth. This was achieved through collaboration in trade, industry, monetary policy, finance, and socio-economic issues among regional partners. Members of the same trade bloc enjoy duty-free imports from one another, while trade with non-member countries involves import tariffs.

ECOWAS member states generally appear to avoid participating in certain trade agreements. If their trade focuses mainly on basic agricultural products and live animals, the sub-region's markets could face significant disadvantages due to the arbitrary selection of sensitive products under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union (Onogwu and Arene, 2016). Given the increasing emphasis on regional integration—and at a time when many ECOWAS countries are liberalizing their markets under pressure from the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—the significance of regional trade cannot be overstated. Similarly, assessing potential tariff

benefits or drawbacks in the food and live animal trade among sub-regional members is crucial to determine each country's contribution to strengthening regional integration through commerce.

The broad objective of this study was to evaluate latent tariff gains or losses in Food and live animals trade by ECOWAS sub-regional members; while the specific objectives were to; Estimate the volume in exports of food and live animals by each sub-regional member of ECOWAS; Estimate the volume in imports of food and live animals by each sub-regional member; Evaluate the net trade of each sub-regional member of ECOWAS.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The nations in focus include Nigeria and other members of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that engaged in Intra-Export and Import Trade in Food and live animals between 2008 and 2023. ECOWAS nations are located between Latitudes 0˚ 26' and 20˚31' North; and Longitudes 10˚36' East and 20˚19' West. The northern border of West Africa is the Sahara Desert. To the west and south of West Africa sits the ocean, which serves as another natural border. And in the southeastern corner of West Africa are the Cameroonian Mountains and highlands that lie along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. The members of the Economic Community of West African States whose trade with Nigeria are being studied include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra-Leon, and Togo (https://ecowas.int/basic-information/).

Data Collection

Secondary source was the major data source for the study. The data were obtained from defined job queries in data source platform eliciting information on trade year, trade value, reporting nations, partner nations, Product name, Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariffs, on the UNCOMMTRADE platform of WITS as documented for Nigeria among other ECOWAS regional members within the years under review, (2008-2023) in Food and live animals.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were analyzed and presented to infer the compliance to the trade policy objectives of ECOWAS by showcasing the latent gains or losses with respect to each of the ECOWAS member nation trade in food and live animals, under the trade liberalization policy framework enjoyed by all members. Objectives (1), (2) and (3) which were to estimate the volume in exports; the volume in imports, and evaluate the net trade of each sub-regional member of ECOWAS in food and live animals trade over the years of study respectively, were achieved using descriptive statistics such as percentages and averages.

Model Specification

Net trade

This was evaluated by the following relationship:

$N_{TM} = X_M - I_M$ ..... **(2).**

Where, N_{TM} **= Net Trade of Members (1000 USD),**

X_M **= Export to Members;** I_M **= Import from members (2008-2023)**

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the volume of exports by each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2008 to 2015, measured in thousands of USD. A closer examination of the data reveals several important trends and insights regarding trade dynamics within the region. The total ECOWAS exports saw significant fluctuations throughout the period, peaking at approximately 1.23 billion USD in 2011 before declining to just over 1 billion USD by 2015. This suggests a volatile export environment, influenced by various factors including global market conditions and regional economic challenges.

Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire emerged as the leading exporters. Côte d'Ivoire exhibited consistent growth in exports, reaching over 283 million USD by 2015, while Nigeria's exports peaked at about 313 million USD in 2013 before declining. Senegal also demonstrated strong export performance, with figures rising to approximately 329 million USD in 2015. These countries appear to drive the majority of ECOWAS's export volume, highlighting their critical roles in regional trade. Burkina Faso showed a steady increase in exports from 2009 onwards, culminating in over 56 million USD by 2015. This trend

indicates a growing integration into regional and possibly international markets. Ghana exhibited significant growth in 2011 with exports reaching over 416 million USD, but this was followed by a drop in subsequent years. This volatility may warrant further investigation into the underlying causes.

Several countries, including Benin, Guinea Bissau, and Liberia, reported negligible or zero export volumes for most of the years, indicating potential challenges in their trade capacities or economic structures. Gambia and Guinea also had limited export activity, suggesting either economic constraints or a lack of competitive products in the international market. The data indicates that several countries, such as Niger, experienced significant fluctuations in export volumes, peaking in 2009 before declining sharply in subsequent years. This inconsistency may reflect changes in domestic production, market access, or international demand. Cape Verde and Sierra Leone had minimal export figures, raising questions about their economic engagement and the potential for growth in international trade.

The volume of exports among ECOWAS member states from 2008 to 2015 illustrated a diverse and uneven trade landscape characterized by both significant players and underperformers. While countries like Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal contributed substantially to the region's export figures, others face challenges that hinder their participation in regional and global markets. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers aiming to enhance trade integration and economic development within ECOWAS. Future strategies could focus on supporting underperforming countries, fostering intra-regional trade, and enhancing competitiveness to stabilize and grow the overall export volumes in the region.

Table 1: Volume of Exports by each Member of ECOWAS 2008 - 2015 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Benin	-	-	-	-	-	36793.158	27081.167	9282.412
Burkina Faso	-	28832.42	39057.621	46127.085	35191.363	45551.588	55407.566	56474.423
Cape Verde	-	-	-	5483.77	102.412	65.091	12.698	205.127
Cote d'Ivoire	191647.382	239809	217702.373	242205.795	273437.62	255499.834	259874.244	283567.353
Gambia	-	-	-	20540.053	20354.674	11820.491	11358.982	1503.208
Ghana	-	-	57253.98	416660.857	175637.544	76865.135	143690.428	170103.57
Guinea	-	-	-	-	-	4353.702	3233.22	3480.465
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.021
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mali	120728.6	-	-	95700.673	130072.112	-	-	-
Niger	-	170915.103	62648.783	93130.757	136128.932	42036.076	37149.896	25814.901

Regional Members	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Nigeria	-	4516.65	9466.955	59962.669	114566.33	313018.249	92757.834	79946.01
Senegal	97686.44	150181.835	132487.775	213874.8	247386.918	338477.087	333638.335	329410.772
Sierra-Leone	-	-	-	-	-	-	275.176	201.991
Togo	39475.4	46143.234	14546.919	33279.79	49171.704	40711.215	48015.283	47664.692
ECOWAS TOTAL	449,537.822	640,398.242	533,164.406	1,226,966.249	1,182,049.609	1,165,191.626	1,012,494.829	1,007,654.945

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2008-2

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the volume of exports by each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2016 to 2023, measured in thousands of USD. This data reveals significant trends and variations in export performance across the region over these years. The total exports for ECOWAS shows a fluctuating trend, with a peak of approximately 1.67 billion USD in 2017, followed by a decline to about 950 million USD in 2020. This decline may reflect the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted trade flows globally. After 2020, there was a recovery in exports, rising to about 1.33 billion USD in 2022, and slightly declining to around 1.25 billion USD in 2023. This indicates a gradual return to pre-pandemic export levels.

Senegal consistently ranked as one of the top exporters, with figures reaching over 525 million USD in 2022 before slightly declining to approximately 481 million USD in 2023. This demonstrates a robust and stable export capacity. Côte d'Ivoire also remains a significant player, with exports around 375 million USD in 2022 but dropping to about 327 million USD in 2023. This trend suggests fluctuations in either production or market demand. Burkina Faso experienced considerable growth, particularly from 2016 to 2023, with exports rising from about 44 million USD in 2016 to over 56 million USD in 2023, indicating a strengthening of its export sector. Ghana had a striking increase in 2021, with exports surging to over 331 million USD after a drop to zero in 2020. This rebound could indicate recovery in key sectors, possibly in gold or cocoa exports.

Guinea and Guinea Bissau reported no exports during this period, suggesting significant economic challenges or a lack of competitive products in the market. Liberia showed minimal export activity, with only slight volumes recorded in 2021 and 2023, indicating limited engagement in international trade. Mali had substantial export figures in 2016 and 2017, but exports became non-existent from 2020 onwards, likely reflecting the impact of internal conflicts or political instability. Niger showed a dramatic spike in exports

in 2017 (approximately 521 million USD), which then fluctuated significantly in subsequent years, indicating an unstable export environment.

Table 2: Volume of Exports by each Member of ECOWAS 2016 – 2023 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Benin	9684.216	36373.513	39961.492	26324.769	10846.585	13061.881	12346.755	29880.577
Burkina Faso	44728.537	59592.813	89498.772	51773.783	63369.617	33588.887	34376.859	56545.747
Cape Verde	107.098	36.128	18.222	205.957	111.464	377.774	23.137	173.666
Cote d'Ivoire	236913.755	259537.524	266775.697	270630.553	282611.223	282068.176	375636.613	327626.488
Gambia	8739.673	5099.911	655.538	1573.135	1952.404	1509.245	1082.929	6762.129
Ghana	87824.997	113012.92	127071.398	125978.207	-	331141.178	232653.185	172865.997
Guinea	6744.637	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	85.985	3.22	78.665
Mali	242792.976	211389.683	219616.212	246653.259	-	-	-	-
Niger	23617.114	521799.199	45710.122	112471.843	47229.759	164355.717	36177.679	26777.273
Nigeria	41431.18	46042.484	58301.109	45968.026	40955.9	30455.067	29348.19	70717.715
Senegal	313218.984	362533.456	403499.098	410797.668	442591.763	513519.106	525370.402	481808.587
Sierra-Leone	159499.58	5638.401	15547.672	-	-	-	-	-
Togo	43945.225	49306.626	51296.485	51751.745	61130.242	76646.386	81892.489	72108.281
ECOWAS TOTAL	1,219,247.972	1,670,362.658	1,317,951.817	1,344,128.945	950,798.957	1,446,809.402	1,328,911.458	1,245,345.125

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2016-2023

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the volume of imports by each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2008 to 2015, expressed in thousands of USD. This data reveals important trends in trade dynamics and economic interactions among member countries. Total ECOWAS imports exhibit a general upward trend throughout the period, from approximately 231 million USD in 2008 to around 542 million USD by 2015. This growth reflects increasing economic activity and integration within the region. However, there is notable fluctuation in the total import values, with a peak in 2013 at about 742 million USD, followed by a decline in 2014 and 2015. This decrease may suggest shifts in economic conditions, trade policies, or external factors affecting member states.

Côte d'Ivoire consistently ranked as one of the top importers, with imports reaching approximately 115 million USD in 2015. This trend indicates a robust demand for goods likely driven by its economic activities. Burkina Faso also shows significant import

volumes, peaking at over 100 million USD in 2012 before declining in subsequent years, which may reflect changes in domestic production or demand. Ghana demonstrated a significant increase in imports starting in 2010, with figures rising to about 125 million USD by 2015. This growth may indicate increased economic expansion and a growing appetite for foreign goods. Niger showed variability in import volumes, with a notable increase in 2013 (about 63 million USD) and subsequent fluctuations. This pattern may reflect changes in external trade dynamics or domestic consumption needs.

Benin, Guinea, and Liberia show minimal or no import activity for most of the years, indicating potential economic challenges or limited engagement in international trade. Guinea Bissau and Gambia have sporadic import figures, which could suggest instability or lack of infrastructure to support consistent trade. Mali had substantial import levels in 2008 and 2010 but ceased imports entirely by 2014, likely due to political instability or conflict impacting trade flows. Sierra Leone had negligible imports until 2014, indicating challenges in post-conflict recovery and economic integration into regional trade.

Table 3: Volume of Imports by each Member of ECOWAS 2008 – 2015 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Benin	-	-	-	-	-	28725.04	20723.085	23707.456
Burkina Faso	-	45600.77	64396.019	78317.179	100603.07	95557.219	84455.747	77274.575
Cape Verde	2594.767	1744.478	944.671	405.583	3379.175	1688.901	343.035	308.092
Cote d'Ivoire	97641.471	78130.08	54104.194	67919.748	101389.291	134999.111	86684.65	115302.388
Gambia	-	-	-	540.312	1986.694	1320.239	1508.839	11744.856
Ghana	-	-	39080.954	72772.712	96073.949	112929.954	150057.162	125124.434
Guinea	-	-	-	-	-	8068.993	12063.55	20552.759
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	4686.93	5311.076
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mali	66704.7	-	103509.962	80258.656	113718.462	-	-	-
Niger	-	26943.968	51657.445	26337.766	63614.083	50838.003	58340.866	52160.091
Nigeria	-	12527.254	16160.821	122980.99	33076.819	232823.086	44059.777	32601.543
Senegal	48293.25	48313.301	41453.966	36325.405	31135.845	38215.204	40768.241	38074.922
Sierra-Leone	-	-	-	-	-	-	6747.278	2022.013
Togo	15959.86	22062.71	22193.244	27744.815	28657.75	36981.824	39624.944	37945.535
ECOWAS TOTAL	231,194.048	235,322.561	393,501.276	513,603.166	573,635.138	742,147.574	550,064.104	542,129.74

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2008-2015

Table 4 presents the volume of imports by each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2016 to 2023, measured in thousands of USD. This data reflects varying trends in trade dynamics within the region and provides insights into the economic interactions among member countries. The total imports for ECOWAS show an overall increase, rising from approximately 577 million USD in 2016 to about 755 million USD in 2023. The peak occurred in 2021 at roughly 769 million USD,

indicating a recovery in trade activities following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The gradual increase in total imports suggests a growing economic integration within the region, although fluctuations year on year indicate sensitivity to external economic conditions.

Côte d'Ivoire consistently ranked as the top importer, with imports increasing from about 136 million USD in 2016 to approximately 254 million USD in 2023. This significant growth reflects its strong economy and demand for imported goods. Mali had substantial import volumes in the earlier years but saw a complete cessation of imports starting in 2020, likely due to political instability or conflict. This highlights the impact of domestic conditions on trade. Similarly, Ghana experienced a notable spike in imports in 2017 (around 112 million USD) but faced a drop to zero in 2020, possibly due to the pandemic's impact. However, imports rebounded in subsequent years, indicating resilience in its economy. Niger also exhibited growth, with imports rising from approximately 37 million USD in 2016 to over 92 million USD in 2021, before declining in 2023. This trend may reflect changing domestic needs or external market conditions.

Guinea and Guinea Bissau reported no import activity during the entire period, suggesting significant economic challenges or limited integration into regional trade networks. Liberia had minimal import figures, only showing activity in 2021 and 2022, indicating a limited engagement in trade that may require further development. Sierra Leone shows sporadic import activity, with no imports recorded for multiple years. This pattern may reflect ongoing economic difficulties or instability affecting trade. The fluctuations in imports observed in certain countries may highlight vulnerabilities within their economies, making them susceptible to global economic shifts or internal disruptions.

Table 4: Volume of Imports by each Member of ECOWAS 2016-2023 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Benin	17644.855	21840.234	27531.699	33006.176	27608.967	31044.116	25437.94	33239.549
Burkina Faso	86769.727	88740.82	93257.631	80182.515	76613.146	83291.645	78449.749	82695.883
Cape Verde	428.809	402.391	470.604	688.537	203.874	209.374	2122.355	1395.803
Cote d'Ivoire	136759.262	151907.114	129150.81	194634.718	220743.637	264968.299	197451.388	254744.169
Gambia	1695.67	1374.398	1236.305	2003.91	2163.061	3554.901	6164.864	6652.567

Regional Members	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ghana	59134.266	112721.207	124072.316	96249.673	-	115301.404	106204.841	120924.094
Guinea	12128.549	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	13237.645	12262.414	9092.356
Mali	117731.4	110828.47	106348.599	92690.487	-	-	-	-
Niger	37421.086	52592.249	82705.579	78961.909	100816.983	92818.544	79243.698	58182.241
Nigeria	37158.399	41074.592	49119.122	44668.98	61826.606	58199.311	72786.886	65092.177
Senegal	36573.705	49320.075	53129.92	55994.477	89980.492	78919.27	113645.399	96559.378
Sierra-Leone	5950.377	6520.388	8984.18	-	-	-	-	-
Togo	27784.819	37931.039	33288.935	32658.874	30755.871	27780.754	25510.875	27198.043
ECOWAS TOTAL	577,180.924	675,252.977	709,295.7	711,740.256	610,712.637	769,325.263	719,280.409	755,776.26

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2016-2023

Table 5 presents the net trade figures for each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2008 to 2015, expressed in thousands of USD. This data provides insights into the trade balances of member states and highlights the dynamics of trade within the region. The total net trade for ECOWAS shows significant fluctuations over the years, peaking at approximately 713 million USD in 2011 before declining to around 296 million USD by 2015. This volatility may be influenced by various factors, including global market conditions and regional economic developments.

Côte d'Ivoire consistently reports a positive net trade balance, peaking at about 174 million USD in 2011 and maintaining significant surplus figures throughout the period. This reflects its strong export-oriented economy, particularly in agricultural products. Ghana exhibits a notable positive net trade balance in 2011 (approximately 344 million USD) but experiences negative balances in subsequent years, indicating fluctuations in export performance and possibly a reliance on imports for certain sectors.

Burkina Faso shows a persistent negative net trade balance, particularly severe in 2012 with approximately -65 million USD, which suggests a heavy reliance on imports relative to its exports. Niger also demonstrates a negative net trade balance from 2014 onward, reflecting challenges in its export sectors or economic conditions that limit trade competitiveness. On the other hand, Liberia and Guinea Bissau show no recorded trade

activity, indicating significant economic challenges or a lack of integration into regional trade networks. Sierra Leone has minimal trade activity until 2015, highlighting struggles in recovering from past conflicts and rebuilding its economy.

Nigeria exhibits fluctuations in its net trade balance, with a significant negative balance in 2011 (about -63 million USD) but recovering slightly in later years. As one of the region's largest economies, its trade dynamics significantly impact the overall ECOWAS trade landscape. Senegal demonstrates a strong positive trend in net trade until 2015, which sharply declines to a negative balance, indicating potential issues in maintaining export levels or increased import dependence.

Table 5: Net Trade of each Sub-Regional Member of ECOWAS 2008-2015 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Benin	-	-	-	-	-	8068.118	6358.082	-14425.044
Burkina Faso	-	-16768.35	-25338.398	-32190.094	-65411.707	-50005.631	-29048.181	-20800.152
Cape Verde	-2594.767	-1744.478	-944.671	5078.187	-3276.763	-1623.81	-330.035	-102.965
Cote d'Ivoire	94005.911	161678.92	163598.179	174286.047	172048.329	120500.723	173189.594	168264.965
Gambia	-	-	-	19999.741	18367.98	10500.252	9853.143	10241.648
Ghana	-	-	18173.026	343888.737	79563.595	-36064.819	-6366.734	108110.864
Guinea	-	-	-	-	-	-3715.291	-8830.33	17072.294
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	-4686.93	5311.055
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mali	54023.9	-	-	15442.017	16353.648	-	-	-
Niger	-	143971.135	103509.962 10991.338	66792.991	72514.849	-8801.927	-21190.97	-26345.19
Nigeria	-	-8010.604	-6693.866	-63018.321	81489.511	80195.163	48698.057	47344.467
Senegal	49393.19	101868.534	91033.809	177549.395	216251.073	300261.883	292870.094	-5664.15
Sierra-Leone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-6472.102	-1820.022
Togo	23515.54	24080.524	-7646.325	5534.395	20513.954	3729.391	8390.339	9719.157
ECOWAS TOTAL	218343.774	405075.681	139663.13	713363.095	608414.469	423044.052	462434.027	296906.927

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2008-2015

Table 6 presents the net trade figures for each member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from 2016 to 2023, expressed in thousands of USD. This data highlights the trade balances of member states and reveals important trends in their economic interactions and trade performances. The total net trade for ECOWAS shows a significant increase over the years, peaking at approximately 995 million USD in 2017. However, the total net trade fluctuated, with a notable decline to

around 490 million USD by 2023. This volatility suggests sensitivity to both regional and global economic conditions, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in commodity prices.

Côte d'Ivoire continues to exhibit a strong positive net trade balance, peaking at about 137 million USD in 2018 and maintaining a positive figure throughout the period. This reflects its robust export sector, particularly in agricultural commodities like cocoa and coffee. Senegal also demonstrates consistent positive net trade, with figures rising to about 385 million USD by 2023. This signals a stable economic performance, likely supported by diverse exports. Similarly, Ghana shows a remarkable positive net trade balance in 2021 (approximately 216 million USD), following a zero balance in 2020. This rebound indicates significant recovery and growth in its export sectors. Niger experienced extreme fluctuations, with a peak positive balance in 2017 (about 469 million USD) followed by substantial negative figures in subsequent years. This volatility may reflect changes in market demand or domestic production challenges.

Conversely, Benin and Burkina Faso consistently reported negative net trade balances throughout the period, indicating persistent trade deficits. For instance, Burkina Faso's negative balance peaked at over -49 million USD in 2021, underscoring its reliance on imports. Liberia shows minimal trade activity, with a steady negative balance emerging in 2021, suggesting ongoing economic challenges in integrating into regional trade. On the other hand, Mali had a strong positive net trade balance in the earlier years but shifted to zero trade activity from 2020 onwards, likely due to internal conflicts or economic instability. Also, Gambia shows a mix of positive and negative balances, indicating instability in its trade performance, which may be linked to its economic structure or external economic dependencies.

Table 6: Net Trade of each Sub-Regional Member of ECOWAS 2016-2023 (1000 USD)

Regional Members	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Benin	-7960.639	14533.279	12429.793	-6681.407	-16762.382	-17982.235	-13091.185	-3358.972
Burkina Faso	-42041.19	-29148.007	-3758.859	-28408.732	-16812.898	-49702.758	-44072.89	-26150.136
Cape Verde	321.711	-366.263	-452.382	-482.58	-92.41	168.4	-2099.218	-1222.137
Cote d'Ivoire	100154.493	107630.41	137624.887	75995.835	61867.586	17099.877	178185.225	72882.319
Gambia	7044.003	3725.513	-580.767	-430.775	-210.657	-2045.656	-5081.935	109.562
Ghana	28690	291.713	2999.082	29728.534	-	215839.774	126448.344	51941.903
Guinea	-5383.912	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Guinea Bissau	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Liberia	-	-	-	-	-	-13151.66	-12259.194	-9013.691
Mali	125061.576	100561.213	113267.613	153962.772	-	-	-	-

Regional Members	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Niger	-13803.972	469206.95	-36995.457	33509.934	-53587.224	71537.173	-43066.019	-31404.968
Nigeria	4272.781	4967.892	9181.987	1299.046	-20870.706	-27744.244	-43438.696	5625.538
Senegal	276645.279	313213.381	350369.178	354803.191	352611.271	434599.836	411725.003	385249.209
Sierra-Leone	153549.203	-881.987	6563.492	-	-	-	-	-
Togo	16160.406	11375.587	18007.55	19092.871	30374.371	48865.632	56381.614	44910.238
ECOWAS TOTAL	642709.739	995109.681	608656.117	632388.689	336516.951	677484.139	609631.049	489568.865

Source: Computed from UNCommtrade Data 2016-2

CONCLUSION

This study highlights critical disparities in the trade of food and live animals among ECOWAS member states from 2008 to 2023, revealing both progress and persistent challenges in achieving regional trade liberalization. Dominant exporters such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Senegal have led trade growth, while the limited engagement of countries like Guinea Bissau and Liberia underscores uneven participation. Trade imbalances, marked by recurring deficits in nations like Burkina Faso and Niger, reflect deeper structural and policy-related constraints. These findings emphasize the necessity of reinforcing regional integration through the removal of non-tariff barriers, investment in trade infrastructure, and the promotion of economic diversification. Harmonizing customs procedures and enhancing trade capacity are essential to level the playing field and enable inclusive growth. Moving forward, deeper inquiry into the effects of political instability and external trade agreements on intra-ECOWAS trade will be vital. Achieving the vision of a fully integrated ECOWAS economy hinges on tailored support for underperforming states and sustained commitment to cohesive regional development strategies.

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